

# MONTHLY MENTOR

"A" Player human capital leadership by

HUNT EXECUTIVE SEARCH

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*For twenty five years, the Monthly Mentor has been a value added service to encourage our employer and candidate clients in their Personal & Professional Development.*



## THE ONE THING THAT WILL MAKE YOU OR BREAK YOU

*I am the one thing. Who am I?*

*I am your constant companion.*

*I am your greatest helper or heaviest burden.*

*I will push you forward or drag you down to failure.*

*I am completely at your command.*

*Half the things you do, you might just as well turn over to me and I will be able to do them quickly and correctly.*

*I am easily managed-you must merely be firm with me. Show me exactly how you want something done and after a few lessons I will do it automatically.*

*I am the servant of all great individuals, and alas, of all failures as well. Those who are great, I have made great. Those who are failures, I have made failures.*

*I am not a machine, though I work with all the precision of a machine plus the intelligence of a human.*



*You may run me for profit or run me for ruin – it makes no difference to me.*

*Take me, train me, be firm with me, and I will place the world at your feet.*

*Be easy with me and I will destroy you.*

*Who am I?*

*I am habit.*

By J.B. Hunt

It's unknown who wrote the vignette I paraphrased, but it's pretty wise.

In interviewing and assessing thousands of candidates and clients, I've learned it's habit's that underpin most of the good or not so good behaviors and actions that determine results on the job.

With self-knowledge and proper motivation, people can most certainly change their destiny by simply changing their habits.

I've heard a hundred times, that people believe it takes 21 days to master a new habit. That wishful thinking!

I've adhered to a disciplined diet, stopped consuming alcohol, and/or hit the gym for 21 days dozens of times in my life, only to fall out of habit on every occasion.

Self-help books and motivational gurus have promoted the 21-day myth for at least 50 years, with little research to validate the claim. In a 2009 European study, participants took a full 66 days to adopt a new habit.

As much as we'd like to think we're in control, making conscious decisions, many of our behaviors are automatic. We deny this reality because it's much nicer to believe we're disciplined beings who continuously exercise free will.

A Texas A&M University study reveals how strongly habits rule our lives. Participants kept

diaries of what they were doing, thinking and feeling. After reviewing the data, researchers found the diarists engaged in habitual behaviors one-third to one-half the time.

## Anatomy of a Habit

There are three characteristics of habits:

- 1. AUTOMATIC.** We're only vaguely aware of performing them and do so without conscious deliberation.
- 2. ROUTINE.** We perform them without any emotions.
- 3. CONTEXTUAL.** Habits are strongly rooted and paired with situations. We do the same things in the same circumstances.

We'd like to think our habits follow our intentions. If you've ever made a resolution or gone on a diet, you know it's much more complicated. It's hard to forsake an ingrained habit and seamlessly replace it with new-and-improved behavior.





But as you repeat a new habit, it strengthens its hold. Similarly, if you resist making a desired change, it's harder for new habits to stick. Your challenge is to resist old habits long enough to break their automatic pull.

## 6 Steps to Changing a Habit

Many of us give up too soon when trying to change a habit. It's not that we're weak. Changing habits is hard work. You'll succeed when you are clear about your goals and strongly believe in their worth.

Researchers offer six suggestions for changing a habit:

- 1. BECOME MORE AWARE.** Be acutely mindful of the habit's cues and your unconscious reactions to situations. Increase your consciousness by tracking your progress.
- 2. VISUALIZE SMALL, CONCRETE STEPS.** Make plans to respond to cues differently.
- 3. TOLERATE FEELINGS OF DISCOMFORT.** Delay gratification. Sit with negative feelings,

and wait for them to pass. Do something different. Be patient and forgiving.

**4. GET SUPPORT.** Make bets with a friend. Make behavioral change fun, and enjoy the ride. Hire a coach to guide you.

**5. SUBSCRIBE TO REALISTIC OPTIMISM.** Believe you can change, yet expect hiccups. Focus on progress, not perfection.

**6. PERSEVERE.** Keep on keeping on. Every small step is progress. Believe in your success long enough and it will happen. Never give up.

## Try the WOOP Exercise

Psychologist Gabriele Oettingen describes the "WOOP" exercise in a 2012 European Review of Social Psychology article:

- **W = WISH.** Write down the habit you wish to change.
- **O = OUTCOME.** List the best outcome you'll likely achieve from your new habit.
- **O = OBSTACLE(S).** What stumbling blocks will you encounter?
- **P = PLAN.** Make a specific plan that includes cues and responses.

## If/Then Scenarios

When forming a new habit, create a strong link between a specific situation and a new action. Once this connection has been practiced repeatedly over time, you'll have a new habit. This means you'll need to list many if/then scenarios. For example:

- If I eat at a restaurant, then I'll order low-fat options.
- If I'm served a big portion, then I'll consume only two-thirds.
- If I'm bored, then I'll go for a walk or be physically active instead of eating.
- If I haven't exercised on a particular day, then I will do 100 sit-ups or push-ups.

When you learn how the habit loop works, you'll find it easier to take control of your behaviors.

Habits aren't destiny. They can be ignored, changed or replaced. When we learn to create new neurological routines that overpower old drives and behaviors (thereby taking control of the habit loop), we can force bad habits into the background.

## One integrity breach will undo years of trust deposits

For each situation, plan to respond in a way that meets your intended behavioral change. If you fail to plan for the "if," your brain will likely respond in its habitual way. Be sure to have a "then" strategy for each "if."

Changing your routines and habits isn't easy, but it's certainly possible. If you're struggling with behavioral changes, consider hiring an experienced coach to help you clarify, plan and change your habits.

### Conquering the Habit Loop

Your brain can't tell the difference between good and bad habits. Even after you've conquered a bad habit, its old allure lurks in the back of your mind. One cigarette can reignite a smoking habit after years of abstinence. One integrity breach will undo a years of trust deposits.

This is why it's so hard to create new routines. Unless you deliberately fight an old habit by substituting a new routine, the pattern will unfold automatically.





Heed the stanza at the beginning of this article about habits:

*Take me, train me, be firm with me, and I will place the world at your feet.  
Be easy with me and I will destroy you.  
I am Habit!*



THIS MONTHLY MENTOR WAS CREATED BY  
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J O S E P H H U N T

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